

# THE BRETHREN'S EVANGELIST.

## THE FOUNDATION OF CHRISTIANITY.

A sermon preached by Edward Mason, at Farmersville, Ohio.

TEXT:—"Thou art Peter, and upon this rock I will build my church; and the gates of Hell shall not prevail against it."—Matth. 16: 18.

The interpretation of this passage has long been the bone of contention. Papists and Protestants have struggled long and bitterly over it in sectarian strife. Every letter of this and the following verse has been literally deluged in the blood of martyred saints. The selfish and narrow-minded interpretation of this text has led to the centralization of power, and the usurpation of authority, which has so shamefully disgraced Christianity. Yes, and we see that there is still a tendency toward this idea. Man naturally loves power. And when this greed for authority over his fellows rankles in the human heart, man will wrest Scripture from its original meaning to obtain his end. The import of this text is still a matter of dispute even among Protestants. Party feeling is a great hindrance to truthful interpretation. This party feeling builds up systems and creeds, while Scripture is buried in oblivion. It pays more attention to words and their derivations than to reason, common sense and the great object of Christianity. It should be remembered that the Bible is not addressed to the critic, but to the man.

Our text says, "upon this rock I will build my church." This rock, then, is the foundation of the church. That the structure may be permanent and that the "gates of hell" may not prevail against it, it is very essential that we know what this rock is. If we get this wrong, then the building cannot stand. I feel that I am stepping on delicate ground, and that I shall conflict with the long cherished opinions of some of the old fathers of the church, and which are still held dear by many zealous and earnest hearts. But I fearlessly go on, appealing to the Word of God, the justice of our cause and the common sense of my hearers. Opinions, interpretations and customs, no matter of how long standing must be brought to the light of the Gospel and investigated under the microscope of truth. Age is but a poor argument in favor of a dogma. Some of the greatest religious errors that the human family has ever believed and practiced have been in existence for centuries.

To thoroughly investigate the matter before us, and open up the way to our main subject, we will first say that man is subject to many forces. But there are none so important and powerful as ideas. We are the subject of ten thousand influences every day. Wherever we go, or whatever we do, we receive impressions that either lift us up or cast us down. There are certain impulses that mould the character of every man and causes him to act. Man acts according to the ideas he maintains. The great mass of mankind have never yet attached sufficient importance to ideas. The men that believe in the power of ideas are the men that move the world, though they may be stigmatized by their fellows as visionary enthusiasts. We have machine-men who have no ideas of their own. They are but living tossels of past generations. They arrogantly condemn the theories of others and obstinately oppose every innovation no matter how good it may be. They go on in the ruts made by their forefathers and fortify themselves by ignorance and obstinacy. It is now high time this vulgar prejudice were crushed. As thinking men we cannot overestimate the importance of ideas. They lift the human family from barbarism to christianized civilization. They are the pathway from the kingdom of darkness to the empire of the gospel light. The putting of ideas into practice is why we are so far in advance of the dark ages. These empty-headed practicalists who would clog the wheels of progress, and who would chain the defunct customs of a past age to the present generation, ever show a willingness however, to reap all the advantages of progression. They eat the fruit while they trample the life-seed in the dust. A generation of such men would ruin the world.

But we will advance another step and now say that religious ideas are more important than all others. Man is a religious being. He will worship something if it is even self. The religion of a man underlies his whole nature. Other ideas will rouse some element of our nature, our intellect, imagination or emotions may be moved by some ideas, but religious ideas rouses the entire man. Religious excitement will do what no other kind of excitement can accomplish. Let a man believe he is doing his religion service and there is nothing that he will stop at. When he espouses a cause and believes that to be alone right to the condemnation of all others, and this cause is not according to the spirit of our Master, there is no meanness or cruelty that he will not perform. This accounts for the cruelties that have characterized Mohammedans, Papists and many others. These people believe in the infallibility of their religion,

therefore desired to exterminate all others, and above all if any of their own body dared to strike a blow at their established creed, the penalty was death. In latter days small bodies have risen up and mimicked these great sects in this particular, but as we are living in another age, the laws of a civilized country will not permit them to make death a penalty, they, therefore, must be content with little meannesses and minor persecutions. Indeed religious ideas are powerful, whether they be false or true. When false they ruin, and sink the people into superstition and bigotry. When true they redeem and ennoble the soul and raise the world to spiritual intelligence, freedom and power.

Our next assertion will be that the right idea of Christ is the most important of all religious ideas. This brings us to our subject, "Whom say ye that I am?" is the question of Christ to his disciples on this occasion. It is a question that all must answer. There are now, as there was then, very different opinions of whom Christ was. Some with impious arrogance say he was an impostor and prince of deceivers. Some, who think that what they do not know is not worth knowing, say with a very knowing air that he has no existence save in the minds of superstitious people. Some with a mock reverence say he was no more than any other great man, and may be ranked with Confucius, Socrates, Mohammed and others. Then again others, rising as they suppose, to a sublime conception say he was superhuman but not divine. There are yet a few who will say with Peter, "Thou art the Christ the Son of the living God." Mark now, that he did not merely say, "Thou art the Christ," for many of the Jews would be willing to acknowledge that he was the Messiah, but they would not assent to his divinity. But Peter added "the Son of the living God." He acknowledged him as Emmanuel—God with us. This is the idea we must have of Christ before we become true believers. Anything short of this will never do. Then notice that Christ considered this confession so important that a blessing was attached to it, "Blessed art thou, Simon Bar-jona." He further states that it is only by divine revelation that he could have attained this knowledge.

Then right in connection with this he continues: "And I say unto thee, That thou art Peter, and upon this rock I will build my church." Then we ask what rock? Peter? Nay, dear brethren, that will never do. We do not want the church of the living God built upon such a flimsy foundation as mortal man, no matter how good that man may be. We object to Peter being the rock of Christianity. How unreasonable it is that the church should be built upon Peter. It was not very long after this that Peter himself denied with terrible emphasis that he was a disciple of Christ. Would not he then be rather a weak foundation for that fabric that was to loom up eventually to such great magnitude that all the nations of the earth should find shelter under its dome?

The idea that Jesus Christ is the Son of the living God is a divine revelation. And this idea is the fundamental principle of Christianity. This is what was preached on the day of Pentecost. Upon this glorious confession the church of Christ has been built. Upon the confession that Jesus Christ was the Son of God it was that the early Christians were received into the church. And upon this self-same confession his disciples are still received into full fellowship. This is the rock. Read the language of Holy Writ carefully. Jesus asked his disciples, "But whom say ye that I am?" Then Peter answered, "Thou art Christ the Son of the living God." Then right after this Jesus says, "Upon this rock I will build my church and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it." We do not think that it is necessary in an enlightened age and in a christian congregation to enter into an analysis of the language to prove that Peter is not the rock of Christianity. We merely ask what is the antecedent to "this?" What was the subject of conversation? Take this idea that we have been speaking about from the soul and speech of Peter, and you strip him of all power to lay one single stone upon this great structure.

"And the gates of hell shall not prevail against it. This is a figurative expression, and if we reduce it to plain English it means that death itself shall not prevail against it. The revised edition has it the "gates of Hades." Parkhurst says; "This expression seems allusive to the form of the Jewish sepulchres, which were large subterranean caves with a narrow mouth or entrance, many of which are to be found in Judea to this day." "Gates of Hades"—what is it? Gates of the unknown world—threshold of eternity—and what is that threshold or entrance into eternity but death. Therefore this church built upon this everlasting rock is indestructible. Kingdoms and empires crumble and fall.

Political associations, religious sects, benevolent societies and every institution of man, all in their turn yield to the "gates of hell." Each man who has not made this great confession and united with the church of the good, is severed by death from all his connections, and he dies a total wreck. Poor man—without a friend—without a God, he must endure his desolate doom. The bond of unity and love, which is the effect of this confession, is indestructible. Then how necessary it is that each of us should make this confession, acknowledge the divinity of Christ by yielding obedience to his will, and thus get beyond the power of the "gates of hell."

In conclusion we will but say a few words about the verse following our text, as it has been so badly distorted from its original meaning, to aid bad men to usurp authority and blind the eyes of the innocent. "And I will give unto thee the keys of the kingdom of heaven; and whatsoever thou shalt bind on earth shall be bound in heaven; and whatsoever thou shalt loose on earth shall be loosed in heaven." It does not say, "I will give thee the keys that I will give to no other apostle or disciple." Neither does it say, "I will give thee keys that will give thee authority over the rest." Nor does it say "I will give thee the keys that thou mayest hand them to thy successors." Keys are expressive of authority. It is said that when the Jews made a man a doctor of the law, they used to put into his hands the key in the closet of the synagogue, where the sacred books were deposited, and also tablets to write upon; signifying that they gave him authority to teach and explain the scriptures and law of God to the people. To open what is right and forbid what is wrong is the great work of a Christian teacher. We only know what is right and wrong as it is revealed in the word of God. This is the key—even the word of God—by which his will is opened to man. Whoever we bind or loose according to his will will be bound or loosed in heaven. Peter was qualified for this work because he had made this confession and acknowledged himself as the Son of God. So we obtain this in the same way, by confessing him all. As long as we do this honestly, clinging to his word and not go by authority. As soon as we go beyond we take upon us authority not given. When we add to or take from his gospel we no longer acknowledge his divine substitute our own. When we do his gospel we are no longer his. Therefore we have no authority loose. When we confess his knowledge his Gospel. This is believer and follower of Christ. Authority or become arrogant; every one of us to find out the faith or not. What is reader, to the Savior's question that I am?" Will you teaching add adopt his gospel guide and authority?

## A Mother in Israel D.

Mary Culbert, wife of Elijah Culbert, was born August 13, 1816, and died at her home near Trotwood, Ohio, Jan. 4th, 1884, at the ripe age of 67 years, 4 months and 21 days. Formerly she was Mary Olinger, and was married to friend Culbert September 25, 1838. She was baptized by brother David Bowman, about 1851. For thirty-three years she lived a faithful Christian life, and was loved by everybody. A loving wife, a kind and affectionate mother, a large hearted neighbor, a devoted Christian has passed away.

Her profession of religion was not formal, but she embodied in her life and character the essential qualities of Christ. Hers was a living faith, and her hope of eternal life is based upon good qualities and good conduct, rather than ceremonial observances, although her obedience was complete.

The fruit of her religious experience was very manifest, and her innate goodness was universally admired, because appreciated. Her loss will be keenly felt by friends and neighbors alike, because her influence was ever for the right, and her hands and heart were active agents in the promotion of every good work. Mercy, forgiveness, charity, as manifested in her life, will insure her a rich reward in heaven, when it all comes back to her again, for "whatsoever a man soweth that shall he also reap." "He shall have judgment without mercy who hath shown no mercy," can have no terrors for her, for she heeded Christ's command: "As ye would that others should do unto you, do ye also unto them."

But she is gone and sorrow broods over the once happy home, but we hope to meet her again, when the battle of life is over. Funeral discourse by brother J. H. Worst, from 2 Tim. 4: 7, 8, assisted by brethren John Bowman, of the German Baptist church, and Coyle, of the Christian Church and the writer.

JOHN W. FITZGERALD.

## THE CHRISTIAN'S POSSESSIONS.

BY W. J. H. BOWMAN.

Text:—"For all things are yours; whether Paul, or Apollos, or Cephas, or the world, or life, or death, or things present or things to come, all are yours."—1 Cor. 3: 21, 22.

Tell me not, dear friend, that the Christian is poor. He may not possess much of this world's goods, but what of that? Solomon after much experience and meditation, says: "All is vanity and vexation of spirit." And to this bear testimony every reflective and experienced mind. No substantial and permanent enjoyment in the world. Position, honor, authority, wealth, none bring it. No wonder to hear a prominent Bible character pray for the "death of the righteous." We must die, and only the thought of a righteous death is fraught with comfort to

"Mortals here below."

The individual who carries in his or her bosom the certainty of such a death, only can fully appreciate the facts expressed in our text. That individual *experimentally* realizes its truths. He realizes that he possesses all, all that is *really* worth possessing. He is sensible that around him are thrown a variety of ministers. To him the name of Christ in its grand significance is so sweet, that he forgets all about earth and its troubles, and sorrows. It doesn't matter so much to him through what medium that name presents itself, whether it be through Paul, Apollos or Cephas. Though poor in the things of the world the soul's song is:

"Thou, O Christ, art all I want.  
More than all in Thee I find."

Though tossed on the billows of persecution; though forsaken by friends—"sunshine friends;" though harassed by bodily infirmities; though visited by sickness and death, and though

"Troubles in long succession roll,"

and earth and hell with combined power oppose, having in possession the "true riches," "Christ the hope of glory," in the soul, he bids defiance to the combined efforts of the opposition, and peacefully sits amidst the surging waves,

"Waiting, only waiting,"

to be carried on the other shore. Listen, you that profess Christ. Do you appreciate the above facts. Do you appreciate "True riches?" the Christian's wealth. If not, there is something wrong with you and you had better stop and reflect, and drink a little deeper into the fountain of saving grace.

O Formalist, dost thou know what the name Christ means? Is the language of our text, the language of thy heart? Or art thou professor for mere policy sake? Is thy worth of "blood," or of the "will of the flesh," or of the "will of man," or is it "of God?" in I say reflect. Perhaps you only belong to church because father or mother do or Perhaps only because the churches tenor according to *your taste*. Perhaps you under the will power of some eloquent teacher. The true Christian is dead to everything but correct principle. Possessing Christ, the world may fail, but (Heavenly) "Glory sits enthroned," and to that soul

"How sweet the name of Jesus sounds,"

The song of a truly consecrated soul, and of a heart filled with the spirit of God, is

"Thine may we live  
Thine may we die."

It beats in unison with the language of David: "In thy law, O God, is my delight."

If that individual can get "sweet out of the bitter," he will even go to hear a minister of another denomination preach, and instead of closing he prefers rather to open mens mouths to proclaim and make known Christ. Caring more for *what* he drinks, than for the vessel he drinks out of, he inclines to Phil. 1st chapter, as much as Paul did. If his enemies testify for Christ, all the better.

"Only Jesus will he know,  
And Jesus crucified."

and he wants everybody else to know Him. Dead indeed to the world, his home is in heaven.

Morrill, Kans.

From Dayton, Ohio.

November 25th, Elder J. W. Beer used these texts:—"And they set the altar upon his bases."—Ezra 3: 3; and "I beseech you, therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God, that ye present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable unto God, which is your reasonable service."—Rom. 12: 1.

Dec. 9th, brother James A. Ridenour used the following texts: "I am not ashamed of the gospel of Christ: for it is the power of God unto salvation to every one that believeth."—Rom. 1: 16; and "What is man that thou art mindful of him?"—Psalm 8: 4.

Dec. 23rd Elder H. R. Holsinger used the words, "He shall be great."—Luke 1: 32.

We thank our brethren for their comfort and warning.